

Collaborative Research toward the Visualization of “Pleasantness” in Genuine Lacquerware

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Since the late 1700s, the Kirimoto Family has been active in the lacquerware and woodturning businesses. 31 years ago, I returned to Wajima after studying industrial design in college and working in office planning. It has been 27 years since I started handling every process in the business from woodturning to lacquering, which is rare in the Wajima production region, along with Japanese whitebark magnolia woodturning as my occupation.

I develop ideas by myself, create drawings, and produce wood and urushi products together with craftsmen in the same generation. At arts and crafts galleries, interior boutique stores, and Japanese tableware booths at department stores nationwide, I explain urushi, lacquerware, *Wajima nuri*, and Wajima Kirimoto to customers. I think constantly about how to prompt people to use lacquerware that is made of natural wood painted with real urushi as something comforting in their lives. However, when I interact with customers in stores, I hear them say things like “It is very expensive!,” “I do not know how to wash it!,” “I will not use it because it is too much hassle to put it away!,” “Can I put something hot in it?,” “What? I did not know I could wash it!,” “Can *Wajima nuri* be repaired?,” or “I have never heard of such a story before...” This makes me realize that there are many users with ideas about these products that are completely contrary to craftsmen’s intentions. Thus, I began to feel that it is essential that people recognize that lacquerware is something heartwarming and helps them feel pleasant when they use it before trying to come up with new lacquerware design ideas and

reconsidering the shape and color of designs.”

Since crafts made by people are prone to suffer from their self-satisfaction and conceit, the goodness of the products that they crafted or were involved in often does not resonate with the hearts of the people who introduce them (people working in shops and stores) and users. Other lacquerware production regions in Japan, beside the *Wajima nuri* production region, are also faced with similar struggles. This is the reason I had been thinking constantly that it is necessary to conduct research that helps explain “real lacquerware” in plain language and find expressions that can be easily understood.

Coincidentally, Professor Matsumura of Kanazawa University reached out to me and said, “I am thinking about doing a collaborative tackling with private companies in Noto. I would like to make *Wajima nuri* our focus for the project.” In response, I shared the current situation and challenges with her, which eventually led to suggestions for the proposed project. This project is a more advanced study than coming up with new designs or developing new markets, which are areas that traditional crafts production regions tend to prioritize. I became convinced that this research could help revitalize the *Wajima nuri* industry, as customers who did not previously recognize the goodness inherent in lacquerware can become new “users” by sharing research findings in the *Wajima nuri* production region, allowing each studio and craftsman to interpret them independently, and making it easier

to understand urushi, lacquerware, and *Wajima nuri*.

While it may be difficult to attain the level of achievements during the high economic growth period or the economic bubble, I became convinced that extending this approach could ensure that craftworks will last for many years. This would help *Wajima nuri*, with a history of more than 500 years, continue for hundreds of years from now.

All of the students provided various types of data by taking part in steady surveys and interviews in addition to actually holding and using lacquerware to express your thoughts. Based on these efforts, you presented various suggestions and honest opinions to help achieve the visualization of “pleasantness in genuine lacquerware.” The information was very interesting and nothing but useful because it helped us recognize something we had failed to see in the past and confirmed our assumptions. If we, as craftsmen and sellers, truly understand these candid perspectives and take them all to heart, we can help cultivate an understanding of lacquerware at a deeper level for existing customers and provide customers who have never used it with the opportunity to view genuine lacquerware as a “new material” that has gradually been taking root in this world.

The fact that every one of you who are young students (teachers) showed interest in *Wajima nuri* and poured your heart into the preservation of lacquerware is exciting and encouraging to us, as we eagerly wish to preserve valuable *Wajima nuri* for generations to come. Moreover, I would like to share the research results not only with the *Wajima nuri* industry but also with craftsmen who produce genuine lacquerware, studios, and other producers of traditional crafts, because it will give them useful hints.

I believe that crafting something that speaks to people’s hands, lips, and cheeks leads them to feel peaceful and energizes their daily lives, especially because it is becoming difficult to distinguish what

is valuable and what is unnecessary in this age of material abundance. I feel confident that Japanese traditional crafts will be revived again if the hearts of craftsmen become intertwined with the hearts of users. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who participated in this effort.